Inslee: state is at a crossroads

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Body

Jan. 15--OLYMPIA -- Gov. Jay Inslee began and ended his State of the State address on Tuesday with the same idea: Washington is at a crossroads.

One path leads to prosperity, Inslee said, while the other leads to economic decline and environmental ruin.

"The choice is ours," Inslee said. "If we rise to the challenge, as we always have, we will choose the best path for Washington."

Inslee put significant emphasis on education in his speech, noting his budget proposal includes the largest-ever state investment in early learning.

"The budget we agree on should nurture all our students," Inslee said, "in and out of the classroom, because we know how hard it is to educate a homeless, hungry, sick child."

Rep. Matt Manweller, R-Ellensburg, said he agreed with the governor's focus on kindergarten through third-grade education.

"The research shows money does the most good there," Manweller said.

However, even with an increase in education spending, Manweller maintained he does not believe a tax increase would be necessary.

Although there were certainly points of disagreement between Inslee and Republican legislative leadership, Sen. Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville, said there were also many areas of agreement. Schoesler specifically mentioned the Republican interest in maintaining a tuition freeze for higher education.

"It's great the governor has adopted our position on tuition," Schoesler said.

Inslee proposed a number of measures to increase revenue, including a carbon pollution charge and a capital gains tax, which applies to the sale of stocks, bonds and other assets. The capital gains tax, Inslee said, is an attempt to make the Washington state tax system less regressive.

"Washington has the nation's most unfair tax system," Inslee said.

A new tax like the capital gains tax isn't something the citizens of Washington want, Manweller said, citing multiple rejections of income tax initiatives as evidence.

"We're a sales tax state," Manweller said. "We've chosen to be a sales tax state."

Inslee acknowledged that a capital gains tax would be new to the state, but nationally this form of taxation is common.

"Forty-one states have this system already," Inslee said.

Rep. Tom Dent, R-Moses Lake, said he did not support a carbon pollution charge because it isn't necessary.

"Carbon emissions are going down, not up," Dent said.

Inslee implored the legislature to improve transportation infrastructure in the state.

"Without action, commute times will continue to rise, robbing us of times with our families," Inslee said. "Without action, our ability to move goods efficiently will be diminished."

Manweller said he'll need to see reforms in the state Department of Transportation before he's ready to allot them more money.

Republican leaders still expect to see transportation solutions out of the session.

"I'm an optimist," Schoesler said. "I believe we have a great chance at a package."

Overall, Manweller said legislators on both sides of the aisle were unenthused by the address.

"The reception was generally mild," Manweller said.

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